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On the TRINITY:

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S E R M O N

ON

1 JOHN V. 7.

This Sermon is not to be sold, but given away.

L O N D O N:

Printed by JOHN PARAMORE, at the Foundry,
Upper Moorfields. 1783.

On the TRINITY:

S E R M O N



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S E R M O N

On 1 JOHN v. 7.

There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost : and these Three are One.

1. **W**HATSOEVER the generality of people may think, it is certain that Opinion is not Religion : no, not right opinion, assent to one, or to ten thousand truths. There is a wide difference between them : even right opinion is as distant from religion as the east is from the west. Persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all. And on the other hand, persons may be truly religious who hold many wrong opinions. Can any one possibly doubt of this, while there are *Romanists* in the world? For who can deny, not only that many of them formerly have been truly religious, (as *Thomas à Kempis*, *Gregory Lopez*, and the *Marquis de Renty*,) but that many of them, even at this day, are real, inward Christians? And yet what an heap of erroneous opinions do they hold, delivered by tradition from their fathers? Nay,

who can doubt of it, while there are *Calvinists* in the world? Assertors of absolute Predestination? For who will dare to affirm that none of these are truly religious men? Not only many of them in the last century were burning and shining lights, but many of them are now real Christians, loving God and all mankind. And yet what are all the absurd opinions of all the *Romanists* in the world, compared to that one, That the God of Love, the wise, just, merciful Father of the spirits of all flesh, has from all eternity fixt an absolute, unchangeable, irresistible decree, that part of mankind shall be saved, do what they will, and the rest damned, do what they can!

2. Hence we cannot but infer, that there are ten thousand mistakes, which may consist with real religion: with regard to which every candid, considerate man will think and let think. But there are some truths more important than others. It seems there are some which are of deep importance. I do not term them *fundamental* truths; because that is an ambiguous word: and hence there have been so many warm disputes, about the number of *fundamentals*. But surely there are some, which it nearly concerns us to know, as having a close connection with vital religion. And doubtless we may rank among these, that contained in the words above cited, *There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are One.*

3. I do not mean, that it is of importance, to believe this or that *explication* of these words. I know not, that any well-judging man would attempt to explain them at all. One of the best tracts which that great man Mr. *Swift* ever wrote, was his Sermon upon the Trinity. Herein he shews, that all who endeavoured to explain it at all, have utterly lost their way: have above all other

other persons hurt the cause, which they intended to promote; having only, as *Job* speaks, *Dar-kened counsel, by words without knowledge.* It was in an evil hour, that these explainers began their fruitless work. I insist upon no expli- cation at all; no, not even on the best I ever saw; I mean that which is given us in the Creed commonly ascribed to St. *Athanasius*. I am far from saying, He who does not assent to this, "Shall without doubt perish everlastingly." For the sake of that and another clause, I for some time scrupled subscribing to that Creed: till I considered, 1. That these sentences only relate to wilful, not involuntary unbelievers: to those who having all the means of knowing the truth, nevertheless obstinately reject it: 2. That they relate only to the Substance of the doctrine there delivered; not the philosophical illustrations of it.

4. I dare not insist upon any one's using the word *Trinity* or *Person*. I use them myself with- out any scruple, because I know of none better. But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot; much less would I burn a man alive, and that with moist, green wood, for saying, "Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet I scruple using the words, *Trinity* and *Persons*, because I do not find those terms in the Bible." These are the words which merciful *John Calvin* cites as wrote by *Ser- vetus* in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words unexplained, just as they lie in the text, *There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these Three are One.*

5. "As they lie in the text:"—But here arises a question, Is that text genuine? Was it originally written by the Apostle, or inserted in later ages? Many have doubted of this: and in particular that

great light of the Christian Church, lately removed to the church above, *Bengelius*, the most pious, the most judicious, and the most laborious, of all the modern commentators on the New Testament. For some time he stood in doubt of its authenticity, because it is wanting in many of the ancient copies. But his doubts were removed by three considerations: 1. That though it is wanting in many copies, yet it is found in more, and those, copies of the greatest authority: 2. That it is cited by a whole train of ancient writers, from the time of St. *John* to that of *Constantine*. This argument is conclusive: for they could not have cited it, had it not then been in the sacred canon. 3. That we can easily account for its being after that time wanting in many copies, when we remember, that *Constantine's* successor was a zealous Arian, who had used every means to promote his bad cause, to spread Arianism throughout the empire: in particular, the erasing this text out of as many copies as fell into his hands. And he so far prevailed, that the age in which he lived, is commonly called *Seculum Arianum*, the Arian Age: there being then only one eminent man, who opposed him at the peril of his life. So that it was a proverb, "*Athanasius contra mundum*;" *Athanasius* against the world.

6. "But whatever becomes of the text, we cannot believe what we cannot comprehend. When therefore you require us to believe mysteries, we pray you to have us excused."

Here is a two-fold mistake. 1. We do not require you, to believe any mystery in this. But 2. You do already believe many things which you cannot comprehend.

7. To begin with the latter. You do already believe many things which you cannot comprehend.
For

For you believe there is a *Sun* over your head. But, whether he stands still in the midst of his system, or not only revolves on his own axis, but *rejoiceth as a giant to run his course*; you cannot comprehend either one or the other, *How* he moves, or *how* he rests. By what power, what natural, mechanical power, is he upheld in the fluid ether? You cannot deny the fact: yet you cannot account for it, so as to satisfy a rational enquirer. You may indeed give us the hypothesis of *Ptolemy, Tycho Brahe, Copernicus*, and twenty more. I have read them over and over: I am sick of them, I care not three straws for them all.

"Each new solution but once more affords
New change of terms, and scaffolding of words:
In other garb my question I receive,
And take my doubt the very same I gave."

Still I insist, The *fact* you believe: you cannot deny. But the *manner* you cannot comprehend.

8. You believe there is such a thing as *Light*, whether flowing from the Sun, or any other luminous body. But you cannot comprehend either its nature, or the manner wherein it flows. How does it move from Jupiter to the Earth in eight minutes, two hundred thousand miles in a moment? How do the rays of the candle brought into the room, instantly disperse into every corner? Again. Here are three candles, yet there is but one light. Explain this, and I will explain the Three-One God.

9. You believe there is such a thing as *Air*. It both covers you as a garment, and

"Wide interfus'd
Embraces round this florid earth."

But